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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 KINSHASA 000324

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SUBJECT: MONUC -- NO EASY SOLUTION FOR ANTI-LRA OPERATIONS

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Classified By: Ambassador William J. Garvelink for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S) Summary: According to MONUC Kinshasa, the FARDC will deploy up to three new brigades in Haut-Ulele for Operation Lightning Thunder (OLT). Rudia II operations against the LRA will assume a more aggressive stance, as well as deploying Joint Protection Teams to help augment civilian protection efforts. OCHA estimates that the population of many towns in the region have swollen, as IDPs seek refuge in numbers. According to MONUC figures, the LRA may have abducted enough civilians (some becoming new recruits) since September 2008 to more than offset the number of casualties it has suffered. A senior MONUC military commander warned that OLT had failed, and would only succeed if MONUC received additional intelligence from western nations to help locate and neutralize the various LRA groups. End Summary.

¶2. (C) MONUC political officers, including Senior Political Advisor Christian Manahl, recently provided us with an update/analysis of current anti-LRA operations in Haut-Ulele District. The FARDC has announced plans to deploy up to three additional brigades (reftel) in Haut-Ulele (Comment: based on MONUC sources, it is unclear from where and whether the FARDC will be able to supply three brigades, particularly when the FARDC is ramping up for major operations in South Kivu to undertake Kimia II. We concur with this view. End comment).

¶3. (SBU) Rudia II, according to MONUC, will assume a more robust posture than Rudia I, which was limited to containing the LRA. MONUC, with 500 troops hunkered down at its base just outside Dungu, will also take on a more pro-active stance, deploying forces to Dungu town, Duru, and Faradje. In addition, MONUC has committed to deploy Joint Protection Teams (JPT) to Haut-Ulele. This will replicate the JPT model in North Kivu, whereby MONUC officers from various divisions -- child protection, political affairs, and human rights -- will deploy alongside military personnel in an effort to enhance civilian protection.

¶4. (SBU) In response to PolCouns' question, Manahl said that, in so far as there was any pattern to LRA movements, there were three rough outlines: attacks southeast of Dungu, along the Watsa-Faradje road, a commercial route; attacks just north of Dungu to replenish supplies; and a group of LRA forces near Doruma to serve as the forward camp for a possible escape into the Central African Republic. None of the groups were seeking encounters, rather they were avoiding contact with the FARDC.

¶5. (SBU) OCHA estimates that there are approximately 180,000 IDPs in the region due to the conflict. The LRA has attacked 22 villages, "emptying many areas," according to OCHA. The

population in larger towns has swelled, as IDPs seek shelter in numbers. Doruma's population, for example, has increased from 8,000 to 18,000-20,000 since the December operations began.

¶16. (SBU) Since the operations began, approximately 900 civilians have been killed, as many as 1,100 since the upsurge in LRA activity in September 2008. Particularly troubling, in MONUC's view, is the number of abductees since September: approximately 1,200. MONUC estimates that the LRA released approximately half of this number, but that would still leave several hundred new recruits. This figure, in Manahl's view, might almost balance out the 400-600 LRA forces, which the UPDF claims to have killed or captured.

¶17. (SBU) Manahl warned that, with the withdrawal of most UPDF troops, there could be a spike in LRA abductions to resupply their ranks. Manahl noted that we are in a familiar cycle of LRA reprisals and abductions, a cycle that has lasted for over 20 years. The LRA, according to Manahl, was now composed almost 100% of abductees, with virtually none of the original Ugandan rebels remaining in the group. A vicious circle was compounding the humanitarian situation: as attacks continue, albeit on a smaller scale, humanitarian organizations pull back, assistance decreases, and an information vacuum develops.

¶18. (S) Separately, MONUC General Eric Arnaud provided a blunt assessment of anti-LRA operations: from a diplomatic and political standpoint, Operation Lightning Thunder has been a success; from a military standpoint, "it was a

KINSHASA 00000324 002 OF 002

failure." Although the LRA was now dispersed into smaller units, it was virtually impossible to locate the groups in such a large, sparsely populated area. Arnaud maintained that, unless FARDC/MONUC possessed specific intelligence on the groups, more troops would do nothing for the military equation. Glancing at UK and U.S. diplomats, Arnaud said that "there were countries sitting around the table," which had the technological ability to track down Kony." Only "technological arrows" would yield results in the hunt for the LRA leader.

¶19. (C) Comment: A broad spectrum of our contacts -- MONUC, GDRC, and even human rights groups -- acknowledge that removing Kony is the only hope for a quick resolution of OLT. Otherwise, the LRA is likely to play for time, avoiding confrontation, and even feigning interest in a return to peace talks. The LRA is today perhaps less of a regional security threat, but it will continue to prey on vulnerable civilian populations. Absent killing or capturing Kony, what is needed most is an aggressive containment policy to steadily exert pressure on the LRA.

¶10. (C) Comment Continued: It appears that the UPDF has succeeded in its security objective of reducing the threat to Uganda posed by the LRA. However for the DRC, the LRA remains a seemingly growing threat to the population in Haut-Ulele, "a wounded lion," as one observer noted. Public support for anti-LRA operations will therefore remain relatively steady, although not open-ended. For the GDRC, the prospect of continued civilian depredations remains the biggest challenge. From a pure national security viewpoint, the LRA does not represent a threat to regime stability in Kinshasa. We will need to continue to urge the GDRC to stay the course to avoid a return to the former status quo. End Comment.

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